Testing Task Force Recommendations and Current Practice

Recommendations from Testing Task Force	Current Practice
General Recommendations **1.** Since the alignment of standards, instruction and assessment is critical to improving achievement, the Task Force endorses the continued use of state-developed or state-adapted standards-based tests.	The State currently develops standards-based tests including the South Carolina Readiness Assessment (SCRA), the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT), the PACT Alternate Assessment (PACT-Alt), the High School Assessment Program (HSAP), the HSAP Alternate Assessment (HSAP-Alt), and the End-of-Course Examination Program (EOCEP). http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/
2. The state should provide a formative assessment system that allows educators to monitor student progress during the school year.	The State developed benchmark tests in English language arts and mathematics for grades 3-8 and distributed those to the districts. The State is currently making some revisions to some of the benchmark tests so that they will align to current curriculum standards. Resources for teachers writing test items include Assessment Literacy courses and materials posted on the Web site (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/resources/asmtliteracy.htm), *Mentor for South Carolina* (http://www.NCSMentor.com/customers.htm), release test items for PACT (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/PACT/releaseitems/) and HSAP (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Programs/HSAP/releaseitems.htm), Teachers Guides for EOCEP (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment//Programs/endofcourse/index.htm), and a television series (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/News/TV101802.htm).
3. The future of assessment is computerized. The state should position itself to administer and score all assessments electronically.	SCRA ratings are all collected online. A small online pilot was conducted for EOCEP in Fall 2004 and a larger pilot is planned for Spring 2005. Districts have been surveyed to determine whether or not they have the technology infrastructure to support a statewide online administration of EOCEP for Summer 2005 (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Programs/endofcourse/eMeasurement.pdf). The Department plans to conduct further study of online assessment.
4. More information about the state standards and assessments must be developed and released.	The current resources are located on the Web at http://www.myscschools.com/offices/cso/ and http://www.sctlc.com/sctlc/standards/default.cfm. The Department continually updates and adds new materials. The teacher recertification course, Assessing Standards in the Classroom, reviews many of the principles the state uses to develop assessments aligned with the standards and demonstrates processes through released NAEP and PACT items.
4a. Stakeholders need additional clarifying information about the standards. Electronic resources, in addition to more traditional materials, should be developed so that students, educators and parents can easily access clarifying information about the essential nature of the standards.	The current resources are located on the Web at http://www.myscschools.com/offices/cso/ and http://www.sctlc.com/sctlc/standards/default.cfm. The Department continually updates and adds new materials.

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4b.Additional review should also be undertaken to determine if the standards can undergo further prioritizations.	As curriculum standards are revised, they will be guided by a new taxonomic system. Taxonomy academies are taking place during this academic year (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/cso/enhance/Taxonomy_Academy_04.htm).
4c.Large numbers of test items, along with technical information about their difficulty, should be released so that the link between the standards and expected student performance is clarified.	The items that have been released can be located on the following Web sites: http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/PACT/releaseitems/, http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Programs/HSAP/releaseitems.htm, and http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment//Programs/endofcourse/index.htm.
4d.Students, educators and the public should have access to released forms of complete tests.	The Department is developing a plan.
5.The state should have an expanded role in improving classroom assessment (technical assistance in the development of an item pool and professional development).	The Department conducts Assessment Literacy courses and workshops and posts materials on the Web site (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/resources/asmtliteracy.htm and http://www.myscschools.com/offices/cso/enhance/StandardsinPractice.htm). The Department also broadcasts a television series (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/News/TV101802.htm) and hosts professional development sessions for analyzing benchmark results for participating schools.
6.After each annual assessment, a team of curriculum experts should meet with the Office of Assessment staff and thoroughly analyze the results of the tests, including performance item by item, to identify additional information about the assessment results and instruction which should be disseminated.	The analyses that have been conducted for Spring 2004 include: http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Resources/HSAPBlitz.ppt (High School ELA), http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Resources/EOCEPPS022205.ppt (Physical Science and Biology), http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Resources/PACT102.ppt (Science), http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Resources/SSconference04.ppt (Social Studies). Presentations from previous years can be located at http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Resources/PowerPointPresentations2.htm.
Short-Term Recommendations for PACT **1.** The Department of Education should continue its efforts to create clearly written and understandable descriptions of achievement levels that describe specific aspects of what students at particular achievement levels can and cannot do.	Draft descriptions can be located at http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/PACT/PLD.pdf.
2.A schedule for releasing items and test forms should be developed and implemented. .	The items that have been released can be located on the following Web sites: http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/PACT/releaseitems/, http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Programs/HSAP/releaseitems.htm, and http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment//Programs/endofcourse/index.htm. Currently, the Department releases items periodically when we determine that we have adequate numbers to enable the release of some items.

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3.An interim approach to strand-level reporting needs to be developed and implemented.	The Department, in consultation with SERVE, sponsored a study addressing this topic (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Publications/SERVE020705.pdf) and is reviewing how to implement the recommendations.
Longer-Term Recommendations for PACT **Standards** **1.**The standards and strands should be revisited, revisions made based on a process of prioritization and an organizational system for them developed and implemented that will support more reliable strand-level reporting for individual students and groups of students.	The standard operating procedure for the review and revision of standards (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/cso/documents/SOP2-RevisedJune2003_000.doc) explains the current process.
2.Key standards that reflect the most important outcomes should be identified for each grade and subject.	As curriculum standards are revised, they will be guided by a new taxonomic system. Taxonomy academies are taking place during this academic year (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/cso/enhance/Taxonomy_Academy_04.htm).
3.Standards should be translated into item specifications that guide item development. Item specifications should allow each item to be described and tagged in terms of a primary standard, cognitive process and knowledge or content dimension.	An example of the current item specifications can be found at http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Publications/BridgeDoc3-5013004.doc.
Testing **1.** The amount of testing is excessive and needs to be reduced.	All testing conducted by or through the Department of Education is required by state and/or federal law.
1a. Testing should be reduced by developing a sampling design for science and social studies. In such a design every student would take either social studies or science each year, but not both, except in grades where census testing in science is required in science to meet NCLB requirements.	Science and social studies are tested annually in grades 3-8 as required by state law.
1b.The extended response section [should] be administered in March to reduce testing overload and scoring turnaround time.	The extended response section is part of the English language arts test, which is administered in May.
1c.Field test items should be included in each subject area test so that separate field tests would not be required.	Field tests are administered on a separate day of testing due to the prohibitive cost ($4 million annually) of including them in each subject area test.
2. A differentiated assessment plan should be developed that will provide better information on certain subjects at particular grades.	English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies are tested at every grade, grades 3-8, as required by the Education Accountability Act of 1998.

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3.The reading and mathematics tests should be vertically equated to allow for measures of growth.	Two studies of vertical calibration have been conducted (2001 and 2003). The Department is participating in a national group that is studying vertical alignment and vertical scaling.
4.Algebra I and English I scores [should] be equated to grade level PACT so that students are not required to take both tests.	This item is on the Department's research agenda. Current state law requires students to take both, if applicable.
5. The construction of the test at cut scores needs to be improved and the cut scores should be changed to reflect changes in the test.	This item is on the Department's research agenda.
Reporting: The following additional PACT score reports should be provided annually: **1.** Strand level reports for individual students, classes and grade levels.	Scores are reported for English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. In addition, reading and writing scores are reported. The raw scores for the extended response are reported.
2.Right response summaries for students, classes and grade levels that provide a useful item descriptor and the item data, including comparisons to school, district or state data as appropriate.	
3.Maps of tests, which are visual representation of the test's items and their difficulty, should be developed and disseminated to teachers.	This item is on the Department's research agenda.
High School Testing **1.**Information for improving performance related to these assessments will be enhanced by the formative assessment system item pools and professional development that were described in the general recommendations.	Resources for teachers writing test items include Assessment Literacy courses and materials posted on the Web site (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/resources/asmtliteracy.htm), *Mentor for South Carolina* (http://www.NCSMentor.com/customers.htm), release items for HSAP (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/Programs/HSAP/releaseitems.htm), and television series (http://www.myscschools.com/offices/assessment/News/TV101802.htm).
2.Practice tests should be available for students to take and have scored on line.	
3.A task force should be convened to develop recommendations for alternative evidence and procedures that will allow students to meet graduation requirements even if they have failed HSAP.	According to state law, students must pass all areas of the exit examination in order receive a state high school diploma.

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4.Review policies requiring special needs students not on the diploma track to take HSAP more than once to determine feasibility of reducing additional testing based on decisions of IEP teams.	Amendments to Regulation 43-262 have passed first reading of the State Board of Education and will be presented for second reading in April. The public comment period closes on March 28, 2005.
5.See cost recommendations regarding the use of physical science and US history course credit.	See cost recommendation #11.
STAR There should be additional study to determine the extent to which STAR is accomplishing its intent to increase minority participation in the gifted and talented program.	Funded by a Javits grant, the Department is studying Project STAR.
South Carolina Readiness Assessment **1.**Continue the Department's efforts to reinforce the SCRA's appropriate implementation.	A consultant has been hired by the Department to initiate these efforts.
2.Differentiate between the Readiness Assessment's ongoing documentations systems and the SCRAPI website.	The consultant addresses SCRA while the Office of Assessment manages SCRAPI.
3.Develop a minimum statewide data collection plan and an administrator verification system.	There is no set requirement for the amount or types of evidence to be collected.
Longer term recommendations **1.**Develop and implement a long-term teacher training plan designed to ensure the SCRA's valid and reliable use within classrooms.	
2.Develop, adopt or adapt a developmentally appropriate reading assessment for use in first and second grades and modify SCRA to include additional literacy assessment for kindergarten.	Only the tests required by state or federal law are currently administered by or through the Department.
Recommendations Related to Cost of the Testing Programs **1.**Eliminate the administration of grades one and two PACT English language arts and mathematics as off-level tests.	
2.Phase out the constructed response items on PACT.	
3.Discontinue the development of new multiple choice tests every year in favor of developing new test forms every other year or every third year.	

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4. Assuming constructed response questions are eliminated, discontinue the scanning of test booklets in favor of scanning answer sheets that are separate from the test booklets.	Scannable booklets are used for PACT and HSAP.
5.Add a scoring center in South Carolina as a specification in the state bidding process to reduce shipping costs, scoring turnaround time, and distribution time to school districts	A scoring center in South Carolina would not perceptibly reduce shipping costs, scoring turnaround time, and distribution time.
6.Aggregate all savings from state program modifications to a line budget item such as that used for textbooks, other instructional materials and diagnostic tests for the classroom	
7.Move the ELA extended response test to the early spring each year to reduce testing overload and scoring turnaround.	The extended response is part of the English language arts test, which is administered in May.
8.Eliminate the requirement that eighth grade students take the Algebra I EOCT [sic] and the grade level PACT in mathematics.	Study of this topic is on the Department research agenda. Current state law requires students to take both, if applicable.
9.Conduct a controlled cost and program effectiveness study of online testing within our state program.	
10. Use Physical Science end of course test to meet NCLB requirements for testing science in high schools.	
11. Require passage of required courses in high school science and social studies in lieu of exit examinations in science and social studies	The EAA specifies an exit examination that requires science and social studies.
12. Provide additional funding for teacher reliability training for the SCRA.	
Additional Recommendation Adopt a data warehouse that will make retrieval and analysis of student data easy for teachers and administrators.	The Department is constructing a data warehouse.